

Streetscape Report

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FALL 2017



GGLO

DESIGN

northwest studio

architects urban designers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

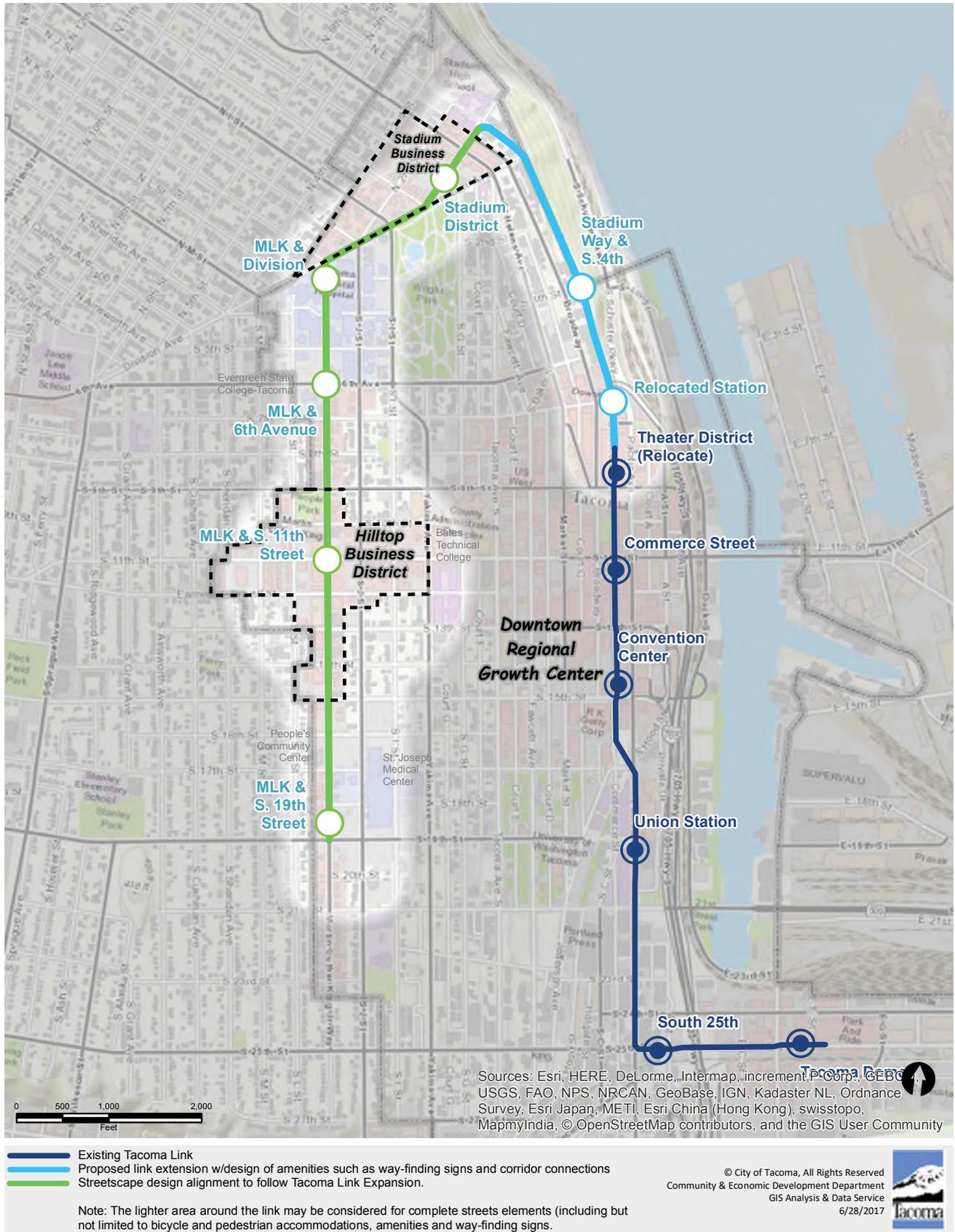
The Streetscape Report's Plan Report is an effort to address community desires and recommendations related to the Tacoma Link Expansion streetscape development. The process is designed to assess community needs within the following categories:

1. Pedestrian Improvements, such as crosswalks, lighting, trees, and alley activation
2. Parking
3. Accommodation of local small business both during and after construction
4. Connection between the neighborhood and local employers
5. Various other concerns of local stakeholders

The process draws from the previous "Housing Hilltop" Discovery Report and from additional community engagement meetings, where insight from residents and local businesses was directly solicited. The objective is to leverage the shared histories and insights of neighborhood residents, businesses, and local institutions to aid in the shaping of municipal improvements along the M.L.K. Jr. Way corridor expansion.

Sound Transit will be continuing new light rail tracks and stations along M.L.K Jr Way. The city of Tacoma will be constructing new sidewalks and right of way where these tracks occur. This report proposes community recommended design improvements during that construction.

Streetscape Planning Area Links to Opportunity



Housing Hilltop

Performed prior to the Streetscape Report, the Housing Hilltop Discovery Report was commissioned to:

1. Aid in the delivery of new affordable housing and supportive services to the Hilltop community.
2. Build upon the social capital and organizational infrastructure already present in the Hilltop, to set goals, measure progress, and implement course corrections on an ongoing basis.

The process involved a walking audit of the area and mapping and analysis of neighborhood characteristics. These were synthesized into focus areas where the physical and programmatic opportunities and challenges for development could be addressed holistically. These focus areas were then refined through community outreach and engagement. Outreach events include:

- Homework Groups - approximately 30 local residents, city officials, representatives from community organizations, and local business owners were assembled to collaborate with the design team through a series of five interactive and iterative working sessions.
- Community-Wide Events. Four public events, including a rummage sale, movie night, block party, and street fair, were organized by the THA team to provide a venue for the community to connect and celebrate the Hilltop. These events also offered the opportunity for the design team to learn more about concerns and aspirations for the neighborhood, which could be woven into the development.

The community based and community driven effort was created specifically to listen and learn before designing. This planning was also initiated to help surface new ideas and continue working others to support actions aimed at resolving challenges.

Results of the study were compiled in the Housing Hilltop Discovery Report.





FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

Process

Focus group meetings were conducted over a single day, with sessions targeted at specific interest groups:

1. The EB Wilson Outreach Session targeted to engage seniors within the community
2. The Bay Terrace Outreach Session , which engaged neighborhood families

During each session, community stakeholders were presented with a brief history of prior engagement in the area, an explanation of the Sound Transit Expansion plan, and examples of successful strategies for transportation expansion utilized in other locations. Participants were then asked to discuss the following:

1. What do stakeholders see currently along the Hilltop Sound Transit planning area and Hilltop Buisness District?
2. What do stakeholders feel is missing or necessary along these corridors?





Pedestrian Improvements

Sidewalks are prevalent throughout the district although crosswalks are lacking and, in some locations, pedestrian connections are compromised by missing sidewalks, parking lots, or lack of lighting. Street trees along north and south streets provide for connections within the district, but east west greenery is generally lacking as connectors between neighborhoods to the west and to downtown.

The pedestrian experience within the Hilltop neighborhood is seen as a key area for improvement. During the Housing Hilltop discovery process, infrastructure improvements scored highly as a motivator for moving into the Hilltop area. This was particularly strong among respondents aged 25-65, both those who lived in the area and those who worked in the area.

Findings during the Streetscape Report discovery sessions provide more insight into the types of improvements desired. Residents note a lack of lighting along sidewalks at night, which contributes to feeling of a lack of safety. Crossing M.L.K. Jr. Way is seen as difficult, due to a mix of long light cycles and a lack of crosswalks. Accessibility issues are also a concern. Current slopes are believed to be too steep for disabled residents. Elderly respondents discussed problems with current bench heights, suggesting that current heights are too low for elderly residents to easily lift themselves from.

Streetscape maintenance may be an area of opportunity for the transit corridor. Complaints of tree leaves, dog waste, and drug paraphernalia are common across both the Housing Hilltop and the Streetscape Report discovery sessions. A program to clean the streets regularly would aid in fixing the misconception that "no one in Hilltop cares," a statement many inside Hilltop feel is incorrectly assumed by outsiders. To further combat this feeling, residents feel that creative paving and/or vibrant crosswalks could be used as showcases for local artists, and to provide a look into the vibrant culture contained within Hilltop. However, this desire is not shared by all. Some feel that money would be better spent on social or communal spaces, instead of "on mosaic tiles on sidewalks."

Suggestions include:

- Improved lighting along M.L.K. Jr Way and streets bordering it.
- Streetscape improvements to ensure universal access to Hilltop neighborhood
- Creation of new crosswalks at problematic intersections
- Incorporation of local art into streetscape designs and paving patterns.



Typical streetscape along M.L.K. Jr Way.

Parking

Discussions of parking in the Streetscape Report and Housing Hilltop discovery sessions centered around concern of mobility to and from Hilltop. While there is currently ample parking in the area, residents are concerned that future development will limit the availability. As most residents commute outside of Hilltop for work, and most workers on Hilltop commute from outside of the area, parking is seen as a necessity.

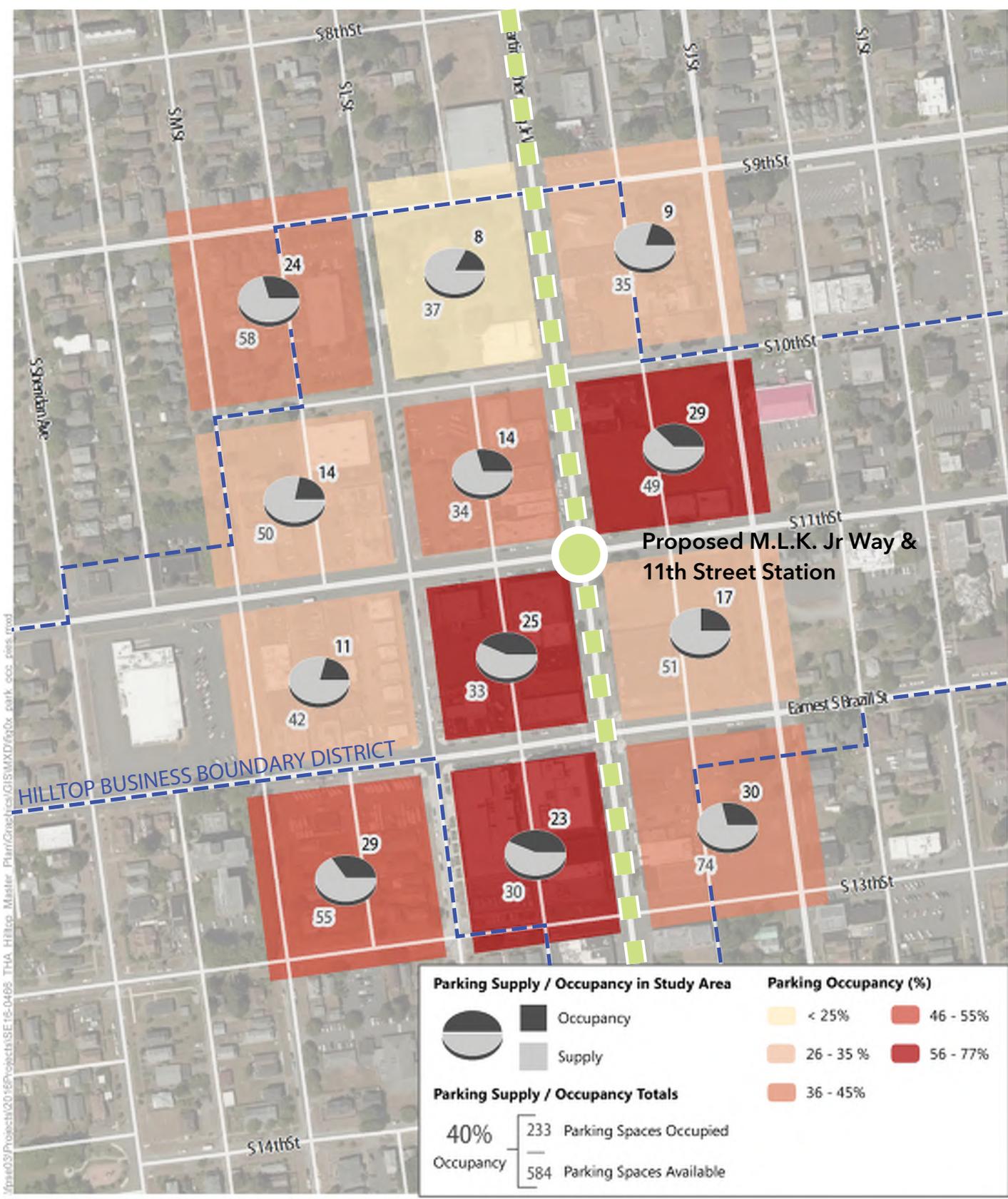
Findings from the Housing Hilltop process suggest that curbside or other on-street parking within the public right-of-way is available on most local and arterial roadways within the Subarea. There are no on-street parking meters in the study area, and almost all of the on-street parking in the study area is not time limited, with the exceptions M.L.K. Jr. Way Jr Way and 11 Street where there are some 1-hour and 2-hour limited zones.

According to observations from the Housing Hilltop walking audit and documentation in the Hilltop Subarea Plan, the majority of on-street parking capacity is unused within the portion of the neighborhood south of S 9th Street and north of S 15th Street.

The addition of the Sound Transit expansion and further development in the area is expected to increase parking demand while reducing supply. Residential parking zones, commercial parking limits, and shared use of parking garages by the large health care tenants have all be discussed as options to combat this issue.

Suggestions include:

- Residential parking zones to discourage "Park and Hide" parking, where commuters leave cars in the Hilltop area while using Sound Transit.
- Incorporation of commercial parking limits along M.L.K. Jr. Way to encourage customer turnover and to ensure commercial parking availability at stores bordering Sound Transit expansion.



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Local Small Business

Accommodation of local small businesses during construction is of concern for Sound Transit. However, local small business owners within this survey are less concerned about impact of future construction, and more concerned about current activity levels. Per those surveyed, the area has a short active period, tapering off after businesses close at 5pm. Additionally, while businesses see activity adjacent to them, retail vacancies result in this activity being disconnected within the neighborhood. Business owners also expressed desire for more space for customers to congregate outside. A lack of exterior seating along M.L.K. Jr. Way has resulted in area residents using commercial seating as a congregation space, leaving the customers without a space for themselves.

Confirming what was found in the Housing Hilltop discovery report, local businesses are concerned with retail vacancies along the M.L.K Jr Way corridor. Vacancy rates here are high compared with the City of Tacoma and the region in general. In 2014, 6% of total land use in the Hilltop area was vacant, with another 12% dedicated entirely to parking. Other than medical and restaurant uses, several categories of business in the hilltop are sorely lacking. The Housing Hilltop Homework Group identified banks, grocery, and library as missing types desired to round out the neighborhood necessities. These vacancies also appear to be tied to low residential densities and limited discretionary income availability needed to help businesses thrive.

A number of small businesses have achieved success as incubators and community minded facilities. Artists, entrepreneurs, and innovators have developed new businesses utilizing assistance from groups, such as Spaceworks, to achieve affordable retail lease rates. However the same development pressure affecting residential home opportunities are affecting these affordable retail rates.

Suggestions include:

- Incorporation of congregation space within streetscape designs, to allow businesses to spill out into public space.
- Creation of public spaces along the M.L.K. Jr Way corridor to encourage communal activity at locations between businesses.



Businesses in the heart of the Hilltop Business District. Corner of M.L.K. Jr Way and S 11th St.

Neighborhood Connections

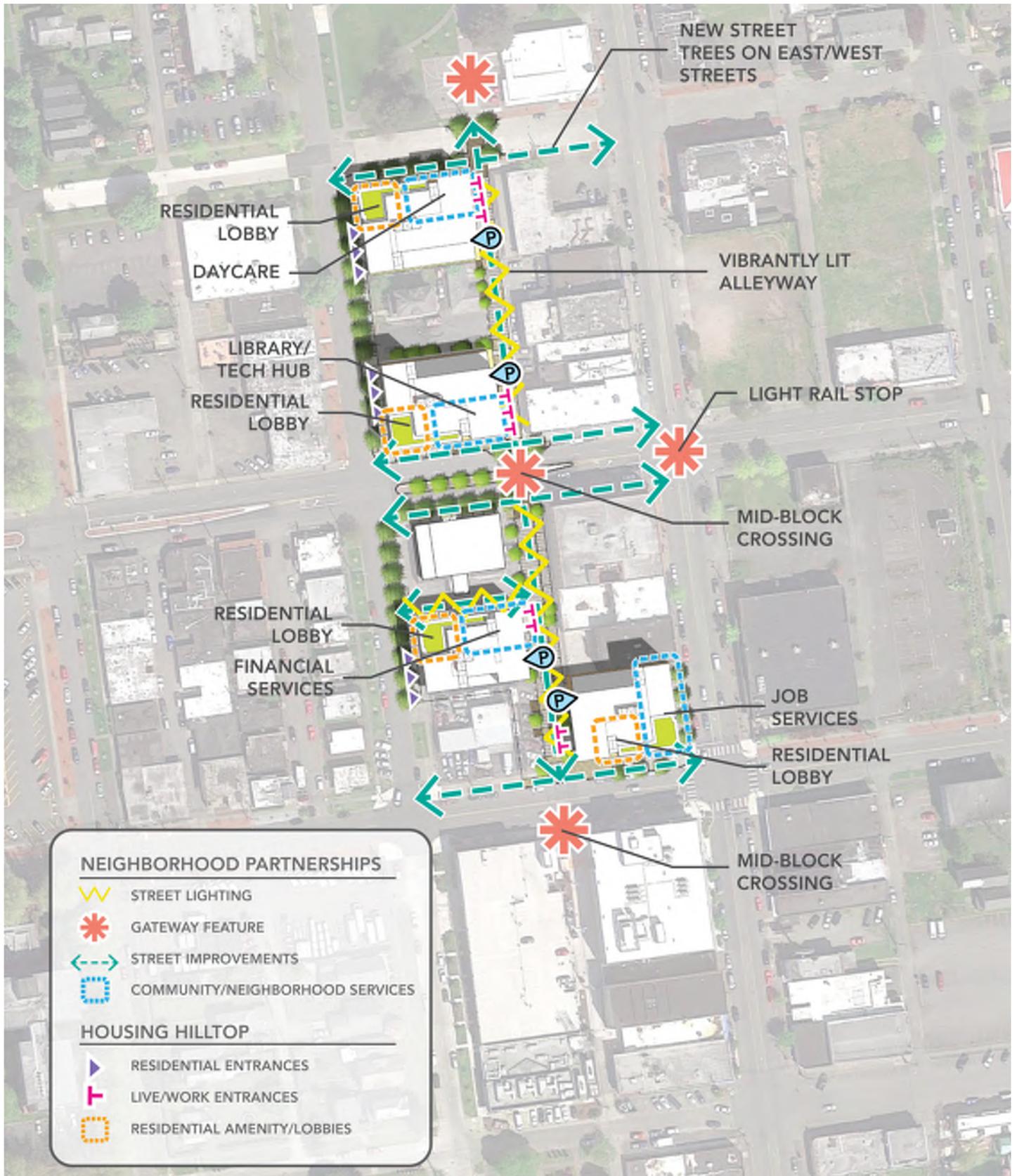
As much of M.L.K. is within walking distance from the residential areas on the western side of the Hilltop Area, residents are expected to utilize the new Sound Transit stations without the need for added parking. Stations at both Health Care Centers will improve access to the local community, as well as provide access to workers who would normally commute into Hilltop, easing parking concerns. Local business should benefit from the addition, as M.L.K. Jr Way serves as the commercial heart of the Hilltop Area. This is seen as a potential driver of jobs within the Hilltop, as there currently is a feeling that M.L.K. Jr. Way is home to many vacant buildings and few businesses.

During the Housing Hilltop process, it was discovered that 23,998 jobs are available in the Hilltop. However, only 362 residents who live in the Hilltop work at those jobs. This indicates a strong disconnect between opportunities and needs. This is evidence of both a lack of suitable housing for employees of medical oriented businesses who currently live outside the neighborhood and also a lack of training and skills for the current residents of the neighborhood to be able to fulfill those positions. Both needs should be met to enhance a diverse and thriving community. When more people can live closer to their work, a reduction in commute time provides more free time for employees, reduces carbon emissions associated with vehicle trips, and reduces absenteeism for workers.

While the Sound Transit addition is expected to create jobs within the area and to provide transit for residents to jobs outside of the Hilltop, the development will remove the option of using M.L.K. Jr Way as a festival street. As discussed in the Housing Hilltop Report, residents are interested in turning the alley to the west of M.L.K. Jr Way into a pedestrian way, and use this alley as the future festival street within Hilltop.

Suggestions include:

- Streetscape improvements along the alley between M.L.K. Jr. Way and S L St, to create a pedestrian area and a replacement for the festival street.
- Streetscape improvements along east-west streets to encourage pedestrian access to M.L.K. Jr Way stations and main commercial street from the Hilltop neighborhood.



Community Engagement

Both the Housing Hilltop and Streetscape Report discovery groups found that residents and local business owners have strong desire for communal spaces and for spaces designed for youth. Lack of opportunity for local youth was frequently cited as a challenge facing Hilltop. Residents, during the Housing Hilltop process, suggested an increase in places designed for youth as one of the top changes that would encourage them to stay on Hilltop.

During the Streetscape Report discovery session, both residents and business owners expressed interest in communal spaces, desiring places for individuals to come together and interact. These spaces are seen as a way to create active streetscapes, provide active spaces for children to play, reducing loitering and reducing crime in the area.

Suggestions include:

- Development of streetscape along M.L.K. Jr way to encourage communal, shared spaces.
- Provide infrastructure to benefit youth engagement along M.L.K. Jr Way.



Neighborhood residents playing basketball during a Housing Hilltop block party.



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